

The three sub-levels of the Second Concentration Level derive their names from the fact that the bodies of the inhabitants emit varying degrees of light. Therefore, the lowest level is called *Little Light*, the middling *Limitless Light*, and the highest *Bright Light*.

Regarding the three sub-levels of the Third Concentration Level, there are two ways in which the great Tibetan translators translated the names of these three. Since the inhabitants of the three levels have varying degrees of virtue, some translators called the lowest level *Little Virtue*, the middling *Limitless Virtue*, and the highest *Vast Virtue*. Other translators called the lowest level *Little Bliss*, the middling *Limitless Bliss*, and the highest *Vast Bliss*, owing to the degree of bliss experienced by the beings born there. The Sanskrit term *shuba* is synonymous with *kushala* which supports either translation.

The lowest of the three ordinary sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level is called *Cloudless*, for in this level there are no clouds arrayed one next to the other. The middling level is called *Born from Merit* since its inhabitants are born there as the result of non-fluctuating merit. And the highest level is called *Great Result* because among the twelve ordinary sub-levels of the Form Realm this level is the result of the greatest virtue.

The upper five sub-levels of the fourth concentration (*Not Great, Without Pain*, etc.), called the 'Five Pure Abodes' (Skt.: *pancasuddhavasakayika*, Tib.: *gnas gtsang ma lnga*), are levels in which only Aryas are born. Hinayana Aryas, that is, non-returners, are able to take rebirth in one of these five levels only if they have attained the fourth concentration and one of the five alternating meditative concentrations (*bsam gtan gyi spel sgom lnga*).

The five alternating meditative concentrations

Non-returners who want to take rebirth in one of the Five Pure Abodes have to cultivate one of the five *alternating meditative concentrations* since these concentrations transform the propelling karma that ordinarily projects rebirth in one of the three ordinary sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level (*Cloudless*, etc.) into propelling karma that projects rebirth in one of these pure levels.

This means that the first *alternating meditative concentration* transforms the propelling karma of the three ordinary sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level into propelling karma that projects rebirth in the First Pure Abode, Not Great. The second *alternating meditative concentration* transforms the propelling karma of the first three ordinary sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level into propelling karma that projects rebirth in the Second Pure Abode, Without Pain, and so forth.

The five *alternating meditative concentrations* are cultivated by alternating an uncontaminated fourth concentration with a contaminated fourth concentration.

Here, an uncontaminated fourth concentration refers to a fourth concentration that is a meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness. A contaminated fourth concentration refers to a fourth concentration that is a conceptual consciousness wishing to take rebirth in one of the Five Pure Abodes. Please note that the contaminated fourth concentration is contaminated because it is conceptual. In general, there are four contaminating factors: (1) conceptuality, (2) afflictive obstructions, (3) cognitive obstructions, and (4) Samsara. Any phenomenon that is affected by one of the four contaminating factors is 'contaminated'.

Since meditative equipoise paths are not affected by any of the four, they are uncontaminated.

Furthermore, in order to cultivate an *alternating meditative concentration*, one cannot utilize a contaminated fourth concentration that is a *path* consciousness because path consciousnesses are awarenesses that 'sever Samsara' (*'khor ba gcod byed*) whereas contaminated fourth concentrations are responsible for causing rebirth in one of Five Pure Abodes and hence in Samsara. Therefore, the contaminated fourth concentration here refers to an awareness that wishes to be reborn in one of the Five Pure Abodes and thus is not a path consciousness. An awareness that wishes to be reborn in one of the Five Pure Abodes (i.e. in a Samsaric state) is not a path consciousness because it does not sever Samsara but strengthens it.

The main function of the uncontaminated fourth concentration, on the other hand, is to avert rebirth in one of the three ordinary sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level, which is why it constitutes a path that directly realizes emptiness.

When Aryas train in the cultivation of the first alternating meditative concentration, they generate a series of three concentrations: (1) an uncontaminated fourth concentration, (2) a contaminated fourth concentration, and (3) an uncontaminated concentration. Initially each concentration remains present for some time before meditators are able to generate the next concentration. This is because it is very difficult to alternate between uncontaminated and contaminated concentrations. Yet with continuous practice, meditators are eventually able to generate an uncontaminated concentration in the first moment, a contaminated concentration in the second moment, and an uncontaminated concentration in the third moment. In other words, they are able to generate one moment of a contaminated concentration in-between two moments of an uncontaminated concentration. Aryas who can generate those three for a moment each, but then have to leave the meditation, have achieved (only) the first *alternating meditative concentration* which transforms the propelling karma that ordinarily projects rebirth in one of the three ordinary sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level into propelling karma that projects rebirth in the first Pure Abode, Not Great.

Aryas who are able to generate a series of six alternating concentrations (i.e. two sets of three concentrations: uncontaminated, contaminated, and uncontaminated), with each concentration abiding for only one moment, have cultivated the second *alternating meditative concentration*. The order in which those six arise is: (1) an uncontaminated concentration, (2) a contaminated concentration, (3) an uncontaminated concentration, and again (4) an uncontaminated concentration, (5) a contaminated concentration, (6) an uncontaminated concentration.

The third *alternating meditative concentration* is attained when yogis are able to generate a series of nine alternating concentrations (i.e. three sets of three concentrations), the fourth when they are able to generate a series of twelve alternating concentrations (i.e. four sets of three concentrations), and the fifth when they are able to generate a series of fifteen alternating concentrations (i.e. five sets of three concentrations).

As mentioned above, each *alternating meditative concentration* transforms the ordinary propelling karma of the Fourth Concentration Level so that it projects rebirth in the respective Pure Abode.

Please note that a meditator who has attained the fifth *alternating meditative concentration* has also attained the first four *alternating meditative concentrations*.

Furthermore, even though meditators first have to depend on a fourth concentration in order to cultivate any of the five *alternating meditative concentrations*, with continuous practice they are also able to alternate between contaminated and uncontaminated first, second, or third concentrations.

Regarding the etymology of the Five Pure Abodes, the first Pure Abode is called 'Not-Great' because it is the lowest of the five, the second is called 'Without Pain' because its inhabitants are free from the pain of afflictions, the third is called 'Excellent Appearance' because its inhabitants have excellent perception of the Dharma, the fourth is called 'Great Perception' because its inhabitants hold excellent views, and the fifth is called 'Not Low' because it is the highest sub-level of the Form Realm.

Even though the Five Pure Abodes are levels of existence within Samsara, non-returners who are born in one of them do not fall to lower levels again; they attain self-liberation in one of these Pure Abodes.

This completes the presentation of the Seventeen Types of Abodes of the Form Realm.

Returning to *non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm and go beyond in the intermediate state*, these non-returners may be born in any of the sixteen intermediate states of the sixteen sub-levels of the Form Realm - with the exception of the intermediate state of the Great Brahma Level - and become foe-destroyers in that state. Therefore, *non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm and go beyond in the intermediate state* of the fifth Pure Abode (the Not Low Level) must have attained the five *alternating meditative concentrations*.

Furthermore, *non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm and go beyond in the intermediate state* will attain the result of foe-destroyer in one of the intermediate states of the Form Realm.

However, this does not mean that after their death as Desire Realm beings (who newly attained the path of seeing) they are born in only *one* intermediate state of the Form Realm and attain the result of foe-destroyer in that state. They have the 'potential' to be born in only one intermediate state (during which they attain self-liberation) but, as Panchen Sonam Drakpa says in his **Decisive Analysis**, there are some *non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm and go beyond in the intermediate state* and who will be